

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: KAZAKHSTAN

by  
Bakhit Ikranbekov

A research study submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

Baltimore, Maryland  
May 2020

© 2020 Bakhit Ikranbekov  
All Rights Reserved

## **Abstract:**

Religion is becoming increasingly important in everyday life of ordinary Kazakhstanis, and adherence to all canons of religion is an integral part of life. This research paper examines how free is the practice of religion in Kazakhstan through the dominant religion – Islam. First of all, it is important to understand whether the government is doing well in terms of religious and human freedom rights, because if they are not, it can spill out into underground movement with extremist and terrorist movements in the future. Secondly, findings and knowledge are important to Kazakh citizens because if any of the groups of citizens can not freely exercise their rights as people and as citizens of Kazakhstan, which are given to them by the Constitution will be a big question if Kazakhstan is a democratic and legal state, whose highest values are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms. The paper analyzes the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and other open sources to understand what do government and religious officials do think and say about human and religious rights. In addition, the author collects data by interviewing Muslims in Kazakhstan from different professional spheres. It is helpful to measure, understand, and analyze the previous experience of people in terms of religious rights and freedoms. Finally, Kazakhstan has overall good standing on individual religious freedoms and rights. The Constitution and other Laws secure the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Participants can freely practice the fundamentals of Islam. However, many of the people who practice all attributes of the religion have experience inconvenient situations and closer attention from law enforcement agencies. This is a common issue and some of Kazakhstan's laws contradict the Constitution and violate religious rights. Moreover, analysis of open sources and interviews prove that Kazakhstan's leadership perceives popularization of the Islam religion as a threat due to poor understanding of the religion.

Advisor – Dr. Mark Stout.

Reviewer - Adam Wolfson.

**Table of Contents:**

<b><u>Abstract.....</u></b>	<b><u>ii</u></b>
<b><u>Introduction.....</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>
<b><u>Literature Review.....</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>Hypothesis.....</u></b>	<b><u>14</u></b>
<b><u>Methodology.....</u></b>	<b><u>14</u></b>
<b><u>Data.....</u></b>	<b><u>15</u></b>
<b><u>Discussion.....</u></b>	<b><u>32</u></b>
<b><u>Conclusion.....</u></b>	<b><u>35</u></b>
<b><u>Bibliography.....</u></b>	<b><u>37</u></b>
<b><u>Appendix 1.....</u></b>	<b><u>40</u></b>
<b><u>CV.....</u></b>	<b><u>43</u></b>

## **Introduction:**

Since the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan from the Soviet Union in 1991 to date, religion affects the lives of Kazakh citizens more and more, and it is necessary for the government to give people the freedom to abide by all canons of their religion. Before its independence in the early 1990s, the Republic of Kazakhstan was a part of the former communist Soviet Union, where religions were prohibited and people had faith in the communist regime. Thus, since many people have scarce or no knowledge about religions they might be susceptible to following different religious sects and streams, which has the potential to raise security threats. So, the research question is: how free is the religious practice in Kazakhstan? I will examine it through the major religion in Kazakhstan – Islam.

My research intends to:

- 1) Discern the genuine attitude of the top management of Kazakhstani politicians regarding Muslims and Islamic practices;
- 2) Determine whether ordinary people can practice all the attributes of Islam;
- 3) Determine what segments of society are less protected in terms of religious freedom;
- 4) Finally, to allow an assessment of why this is happening.

According to the Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “The Republic of Kazakhstan proclaims itself as a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms.”<sup>1</sup> As it is known, religious freedom is one of the parts of democracy. Moreover, according to the Universal Declaration of Human

---

<sup>1</sup> Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, (Almaty, 1995), Article 1, [http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000\\_](http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000_)

Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”<sup>2</sup> The Declaration is a fundamental document of human rights, which all nations and countries must follow. Moreover, “Religious freedom is more than the “freedom to worship” at a synagogue, church, or mosque. It means people shouldn’t have to go against their core values and beliefs in order to conform to culture or government. Religious freedom protects people’s right to live, speak, and act according to their beliefs peacefully and publicly. It protects their ability to be themselves at work, in class, and at social activities.”<sup>3</sup>

Since religion is popularized, the knowledge and findings that I will find are important in two aspects:

First of all, it is essential to understand whether the government is doing well in terms of religious and human freedom rights, because if it is not, it has the potential to cause an underground movement with extremist and terrorist ideologies in the future. As an adviser to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Erlan Karin stated that the terrorist group that operated in Kazakhstan reached out to people through online forums and other platforms, accused the Kazakh authorities of persecuting Muslims, having ties with Moscow, and corrupt politics.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, findings and knowledge are important to the citizens of Kazakhstan because if any of the groups of citizens cannot freely exercise their religious rights, which are

---

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. 1998. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948-1998. [New York]: [United Nations Dept. of Public Information], article 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Religious Freedom: What's At Stake If We Lose It*, The Heritage Foundation, Access date Apr.21, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/religious-liberty/heritage-explains/religious-freedom-whats-stake-if-we-lose-it>.

<sup>4</sup> Erlan Karin, *Soldiers of Caliphate: Myths and Reality*, (Almaty: VMG Group Consultancy, 2014), p.27.

given to them by the Constitution, it has the potential to question if Kazakhstan is a democratic and legal state, whose highest values are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms.

I use qualitative methods to answer the research question. I will analyze the Republic of Kazakhstan's legislation and what human rights are guaranteed under the main laws of the Republic, and restrictions of religious freedom. I will also analyze the media sphere and other open sources to understand what do government and religious officials do think and say about the human and religious rights. Finally, to answer the research question, I collected the data by interviewing Muslims in Kazakhstan from different professional spheres to include entrepreneurs, wage earners, civil servants, and imams. This analysis will help the paper to measure, understand and analyze previous experience of people in terms of religious rights and freedoms.

Further, I review literature that is important to my project and reveal gaps and questions related to my project in the chosen works. Then, I will show ethical biases of my project and how I attempt to avoid them. Next, I show my methodology to gather data, how I gathered the data, and analyzed it. I discuss potential problems and gaps in my research and how I address them. Finally, I show how my research is useful for future researchers and for the governments in the chosen region, especially for Kazakhstan.

### **Literature Review:**

In my view, the question that I chose is not well researched. However, there is much literature that is related to my topic. Lack of human rights and religious freedom can spill out into clandestine movements with extremist ideologies. For the research purposes, the paper will look at literature review sections with subthemes such as religious trends, religious and

human rights issues, the balance of the tradition of secularism and popularization of religions.

There are some works on the religious trends in Kazakhstan, but they do not deeply examine the issues on the security measures and its effects on Kazakhstan. Thereby, my work will present an issue of the effectiveness of the state policy and religious rights and freedoms.

As I have mentioned, there are some articles on Islam, government policy, and legislation in Kazakhstan but none of them have studied the effectiveness of the policy and legislation properly. The questions like: What kind of government actions or inactions rage society and trigger people to step on the pathway of terrorism? How should the government balance between secularism and the revival of religiosity? These questions and many other questions are still open and not fully answered. Most of the authors like Nadirova, Kalieva and Mustafayeva, Poujol, Lain and others, describe the topics of the religion, legislation, and history of the Central Asian countries perfunctorily and do not show how all these gaps affect the security issues in these countries, particularly in Kazakhstan. Thereby, my research project will identify and fulfil the gaps mentioned above.

Moreover, according to some authors, the current leadership of the country does not quite understand and distinguish between traditional religious movements and non-traditional. Such misunderstanding is reflected in political decisions, which, in turn, can lead to serious gaps in security issues of the Republic of Kazakhstan.<sup>5</sup>

However, I found some interesting works in the field of religious freedom in Central Asia. Lenz-Rayman, in her book “Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle. Counter Terrorism and Religious Freedom in Central Asia,” answers important questions for the

---

<sup>5</sup> Yemelianova, G.M. “Islam, National Identity and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan.” *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 15, no. 3, (July 2014) 286-301. doi: 10.1080/14631369.2013.847643.



research paper.<sup>6</sup> However, her book opens another gap that exists in the literature among authors that write on this topic. They mainly focus on the whole region of Central Asia, but do not provide in-depth analyses on Kazakhstan.

Since 1991, all new-formed Central Asian Republics have gone their own ways of becoming an independent country and have their individual histories and security concerns. I have found in Lenz-Rayman's book that some things do not apply to Kazakhstan. All five Central Asian Republics differ entirely one from another, especially the case of Kazakhstan. As she concludes in her book, "I can say that Kazakhstan is the least religious country in Central Asia, and religious policies have only become harsher – especially with the re-registration process of 2011/2012."<sup>7</sup> There are many factors that differs Kazakhstan from other Central Asian Republics such as its economic, history, territorial, stability, and other aspects. For instance, Kazakhstan is the only Republic in Central Asia that borders with Russia and has the longest land border with Russia (4,254 miles).<sup>8</sup> These are just some of the factors that distinguish Kazakhstan from other Central Asian Republics. The reason why authors should make the differences because it is important for the audience who are not familiar with the region to understand that countries are different and some human rights, religious and other aspects are different. Even when she provides an explanation of khoja<sup>9</sup> or when she says that private religious classes are common in all Central Asia<sup>10</sup>, there is a problem of over-generalization of Islam. In addition, there is misunderstanding of Kazakh

---

<sup>6</sup> Kathrin Lenz-Raymann. 2014. *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle. Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. Retrieved 8 Feb. 2020, from <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/455626>

<sup>7</sup> Lenz-Raymann. *Securitization of Islam*, p. ???

<sup>8</sup> Kiprop, Joseph. "Which Countries Border Russia?" WorldAtlas. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-russia.html> (accessed February 8, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Lenz-Raymann, *Securitization of Islam*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 236.

traditions by Western scholars and they could not fully understand all aspects of it. Example is when Lenz-Rayman describes the revival of bride kidnapping in southern Kazakhstan.<sup>11</sup>

However, Lenz-Rayman introduces the region, security, human rights and religious issues in the countries. She makes an in-depth analysis of the religious trends in the region. I found her understanding and analysis of the Islamic trends very useful for the paper. She finds the most typical and prevalent features of Islam in Central Asia and how they were adopted by citizens of Central Asian Republics. “One important feature is the prevalence of the Sunni Hanafi School of Law and their adaptation of local customs; how this combines with pre-Islamic rituals, and the influence of Sufism.”<sup>12</sup> Further, she provided well-researched analysis of the most common Islamic trends. For instance, she analyzed Sunni Hanafi School of Law and Sufism. Nevertheless, I disagree with one of the conclusions she made regarding the Sufism and Sunni Hanafi School of Law, which confirms the above-mentioned gap about the generalization of Central Asia. Lenz-Rayman concluded that “Whereas the legalistic or scholarly forms of Hanafi Islam were widespread in Central Asian cities, Sufism was more prevalent in rural areas and among tribal communities.”<sup>13</sup> This is a general feature in whole Central Asia, however in Kazakhstan, there are no differences whether you are from the city or a village, most individuals all are Sunni Muslims except for some minor groups. Further, Lenz-Rayman by herself confirms my conclusion about Sufism in Kazakhstan with data from PEW 2012 that only 1% of Kazakhs identify themselves with Sufism.<sup>14</sup>

Lenz-Rayman's further analyses of nontraditional Islamic religious trends in Central Asia are noteworthy. She provides such trends in Islam like Salafism or Wahabism that are

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

not traditional to Central Asia and can be considered extremists or terrorists.<sup>15</sup> She gives a detailed description of their understanding of Islam and gives a historical perspective on these groups.<sup>16</sup> Another strong argument is that she identifies that different foreign groups that influence extremists' views in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian Republics. She notes that unlike in other Central Asian Republics, extreme ideologies come from Russian terrorists and extremists organizations like Dagestan or Chechen ethnic origin groups.<sup>17</sup> Also, Lenz-Rayman notes that the Central Asian Republic has problems with corruption and in economic and social terms.<sup>18</sup> "In this context, Islamists argue that the poor economic situation and the rampant corruption could be solved if the society and the state followed the rules of social justice deriving from the Quran."<sup>19</sup> These factors indicate that in the future, some groups can use corruption, economic, and social problems in their way to challenge the governments of Central Asian states.

Further, in her analysis, Lenz-Raman compares law-enforcement of Central Asian countries. She defines the governments' purpose is to protect people from violence stemming from terrorism. However, she notes that it should be done "in accordance with the rule of law."<sup>20</sup> She indicates that Kazakhstan has made some significant steps in order to face threats, which comes from terrorist activities, like adopting new government programs, video surveillance, close cooperation with religious authorities, and launching a website that provides information on counter terrorist activities: [www.counter-terror.kz](http://www.counter-terror.kz).<sup>21</sup> However, she criticizes Kazakh government that "suspected terrorists are often killed in extrajudicial

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 69-108.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 69-108.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 86-88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 211-212.

killings in Kazakhstan.”<sup>22</sup> She does not take into account that in the years described by her (2010-2012), Kazakhstan for the first time encountered the threat of terrorism in its territory, and law-enforcement agencies have not had experience with terrorist groups.

Another scholar that of note is Ahmed Rashid and his book “The Resurgence of Central Asia. Islam or Nationalism?” The book provides a historical overview of the Central Asian region. He gives a deeper understanding of Islam in Central Asia and events that had been before and after the formation of Central Asian states. Moreover, he raises an important question about the future of Central Asian countries, whether Islam or nationalism is prevailing in the region. Nonetheless, the book might seem a little outdated since it was written in 1993, Rashid still raises important questions that are still pertinent today.

The book reveals security issues and events, and how and why governments responded to them. I will mainly focus on Rashid’s discussions about Kazakhstan, but some events that occurred in Kazakhstan are better understood in the context of the Central Asia region. One of the strongest points of the book is that it helps to understand why Kazakhstan and other Central Asian Republics are suspicious of Islamic revival in the region. As one of the factors, Rashid says that the civil war in Tajikistan that had erupted after the independence, where Islamic groups from within and outside the country played a major role, made the leaders afraid of the newly independent Central Asian states.<sup>23</sup>

Rashid analyzes different uprising movements and parties that existed during the Soviet period and how they played out in Islam and nationalism in the region. As he notes, as an example, “The Basmachi movement was born out of the Bolshevik’s refusal to

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Karachi [Pakistan]: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 132.

acknowledge the particularities of the Islamic tribal system of the region.”<sup>24</sup> Another example is the Alash Orda party that was created by Kazakh intellectuals in 1905.<sup>25</sup> “These intellectuals were to lay the first seeds of Kazakh nationalism and their writings today are playing important part in re-emergence of Kazakh identity.”<sup>26</sup> As Rashid notes, Alash Orda’s demands was the most nationalistic in all Central Asia at the time.<sup>27</sup> These demands in 1917 included, “... (1) all land seized by the Russians be returned to the Kazakhs, (2) Russian immigration into Turkestan be stopped, (3) education should be in the Kazakh language and (4) Kazakhs should stop helping the war effort.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, in the 1930s, all leaders of Alash Orda died by Stalin’s purges of removing the leadership from power.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to indicate that Alash Orda leaders are Kazakhs who were fighting against the colonial rule of Russians during the early Soviet period, and are considered as national heroes. It is becoming more significant in the context of the overall rise of nationalism around the world.<sup>30</sup> Kazakhstan is not an exemption; more and more ordinary conflicts are developing into ethnic ones. The recent example is the conflict between Kazakh and Dungans, where at least ten people died.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Erlan Karin and Jacob Zenn note in their book “Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Foreign Fighters in the Syrian War,” almost all terrorist organizations that were formed in Central Asia and Caucasus, first were

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 167

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 112

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 112

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 113

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Jack Snyder. 2019. “The Broken Bargain: How Nationalism Came Back.” *Foreign Affairs* 98 (2): 54–60. doi:<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/archive>.

<sup>31</sup> Dungans are the descendants of the Chinese who migrated to Central Asia from China in the second half of the 19th century due to persecution by the Chinese authorities. They profess Islam. Source: BBC, Feb. 8 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-51425903>, Translated by me.; Tamila Varshalomidze, *Ethnic Violence Blows the Hole in Kazakhstan's Narrative of Tolerance*, Aljazeera, Feb. 10 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/ethnic-violence-blows-hole-kazakhstan-narrative-tolerance-200210091600580.html>

formed as nationalist groups that eventually changed to Islamic groups with extremist ideology.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, Rashid explains why Islam is important for Kazakhs, "...Islam now holds a fascination for Kazakhs, not just for religious reasons but because it is a part of their historical and national identity which they want to assert and which makes them decisively different from Russians."<sup>33</sup> It is becoming an important security issue because, as noted above, there is a fine line between nationalism and fundamental Islam. Especially in the context of Kazakhstan, where 61,3% of population is ethnic Kazakhs, 26,7 % Russians and 12 % of other minor ethnicities.<sup>34</sup>

Hann and Pelkmans agree with Rashid on the issue that Central Asian governments use of Islam as a nation-building instrument, but for individual reasons. "These amalgamations of nationalist and religious ideologies have assumed different forms throughout the region, but the tendency of the new governments to cultivate specific national forms of Islam to underpin nation-building was found everywhere."<sup>35</sup>

Hann and Pelkmans analyze Islam in Central Asia in different periods: before and after socialism until the present day. Their research provides insight as to why the modern governments in Central Asia are unable to balance the secularity and religiosity. Both researchers make interesting conclusions in three distinct ways. They argues that the new elites used Islam in nation-building after the collapse of Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, they

---

<sup>32</sup> Erlan Karin and Jacon Zenn, *Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Foreign Fighters in the Syrian War*, (Astana: CO3, 2017), p. 15

<sup>33</sup> Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> *Kazakhstan Population 2020*, World Population Review, Access date Feb.15, 2020, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-population/>

<sup>35</sup> Chris Hann, and Mathijs Pelkmans. "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 9 (November 2009): 1517–41. doi:10.1080/09668130903209111, p.1527

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.1533

interpreted Islam in its own way.<sup>37</sup> Finally, using Wahabi ideology as a threat and balancing government strategy between secularism and religiosity.<sup>38</sup> However, once again, they conduct their analysis on three extremely different cases like Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Xinjiang.<sup>39</sup>

Another critical research work is “Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Kazakhstan” by a group of Kazakhstani scholars. They analyze Kazakh government regulation of religious processes through legislation and human rights institutions that operate or write on Kazakhstan religious freedom issues.<sup>40</sup> They claim that democratic principles and human rights are not foregrounded in government policy despite Constitutional declarations and international obligations.<sup>41</sup> Their research provides readers with good overall insight on the religious rights and freedoms issues in Kazakhstan. They compare government created and affiliated human rights and religious freedom organizations with independent non-governmental organizations and the differences in such organizations’ positions. For instance, organizations that are created or affiliated by the government’s claim that the government places importance on and guarantees human rights and religious freedom in Kazakhstan, however, independent NGOs have different opinions.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, they mention that government officials frequently emphasize the secularity of Kazakhstan. “The Kazakh understanding of secularism excludes believers and religious associations from public life. The principle of separation of religious associations and state is understood primarily as non-interference of religious association to political

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.1533

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Roman Podoprighora et al. “Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Kazakhstan,” *Statute Law Rev*, (August 12, 2019). <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:5WT1-07T1-FGJR-24BT-00000-00&context=1516831>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

activity.”<sup>43</sup> I would also add to this statement that it is not a reverse statement as political activity frequently interferes with religion.

It is seen from their legislation analysis that minority religious groups, such as Ahmadiya community and Scientology Church, face problems in registration after adopting the Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations.<sup>44</sup>

It is also important to understand how international organizations perceive human rights and religious freedom in Kazakhstan. Most international organizations with human rights rankings describe Kazakhstan as a country with a poor human rights indicator. For instance, Freedom House ranks Kazakhstan as “not free.”<sup>45</sup> Amnesty International describes Kazakhstan’s restrictions as, “Leading or participating in an unregistered organization continued to be an offense. Trade unions and NGOs faced undue restrictions. Torture and other ill-treatment in detention facilities persisted. Journalists were subjected to politically motivated prosecutions and attacks. Women and people with disabilities continued to face discrimination.”<sup>46</sup>

It especially became evident in 2019, after the first President of Kazakhstan’s resignation, who ruled the country since its independence from the USSR. After his resignation and renaming of capital from Astana to Nur-Sultan, protests spread in two major cities of Kazakhstan: Almaty and Astana.<sup>47</sup> “Kazakh police detained about 20 people on Thursday (03/21/2019) who protested against the renaming of the Central Asian country’s

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Freedom in the World 2019: Kazakhstan*, Freedom House, Access date Feb.16, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/kazakhstan>

<sup>46</sup> *Kazakhstan*, Amnesty International, Access date Feb.24, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/>

<sup>47</sup> *Kazakh Police disperse protest against renaming of capital*, Reuters, Mar.21, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-protests/kazakh-police-disperse-protest-against-renaming-of-capital-idUSKCN1R20K0>



capital city after ex-president Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first decision taken by his successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, after just a few months, the Kazakh government decided to make snap elections to fill the void of president. In Kazakhstan’s history, almost all elections are snap elections meaning that they are conducted very short notice.<sup>49</sup> Once again, people went to protest and the Kazakh police detained approximately 500 people.<sup>50</sup> It is imperative to note how the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan classified the protesters. “The Interior Ministry said about 500 people had been detained, describing them as ‘radical elements seeking to destabilize society.’”<sup>51</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Office expressed concern about the state’s response to the protests and called for compliance on human rights.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the thematic of my research paper, I will focus on what international organizations says about freedom of religion in Kazakhstan as many of them claim that there are religious freedom violations.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that some scholars, like Olcott, express concerns about how authorities can use fear of terrorism and extremism, and related laws to chase political opponents, protesters, and religious minorities.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> *The history of presidential elections in Kazakhstan*, Sputnik Kazakhstan, Access date Feb.24, 2020, <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/spravka/20190319/9203775/hronologiya-vybory-prezident-kazakhstan.html>, translated by author

<sup>50</sup> *In Kazakhstan, 500 Deatined After Protesting Election Seen as Shoo-In*, The New York Times, June 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/09/world/asia/kazakhstan-election-president.html>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> *UN Human Rights Office calls on Kazakhstan to respect freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression and right to political participation*, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, June 12, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24691&LangID=E>

<sup>53</sup> *Kazakhstan. Events of 2018*, Human Rights Watch, Access date Feb. 24, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kazakhstan#ada87c>

<sup>54</sup> Martha Brill Olcott . “Freedom of Religion, Tolerance, and Security in Central Asia.” *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (September 2017): 24–34. doi:10.1080/15570274.2017.1354473, p. 29.

To summarize the literature review section, it is evident that almost all scholars and international organizations describe Kazakhstan as having poor human and religious rights and freedoms. Apart from these, there are some gaps in existing literature (and outdated literature) such as the generalization of all Central Asia states and the lack of a deep understanding of traditions of Kazakhstanis.

### **Hypothesis:**

Based on the literature review section and my overall experience, I choose to test the following hypotheses (H) :

H1: Religious Freedom in Kazakhstan is not free, as claimed by most International Organizations.

H2: The most vulnerable population is government workers.

As mentioned above, I have chosen these hypotheses because of the literature review section and my own experience. All My existing work experience is related to Kazakhstan's public service. From the first days of working in the Financial Police of Kazakhstan, I was told not to wear a beard. However, it was not even a beard but just stubble. When I switched to another job to the Ministry of National Economy, there was the same unofficial rule about a beard. It must be understood that for a Muslim wearing a beard is desirable. Moreover, over the years of work in the agency and in the ministry, I have never seen people that \ pray during a day or women wear hijab.

### **Methodology:**

To test my hypotheses, I chose to use qualitative methods. I collected data by interviewing Muslims in Kazakhstan from different professional spheres, including an owner

of a business, self-employed individuals, employee in one of the non-state organizations, a public servant, and an Imam (see Appendix A).

Aside from conducting interviews, I also gather information from existing data such as official speeches of politicians and religious leaders, media articles, legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and other such open source materials.

As of lately, the state has strengthened and tightened security issues, therefore people are afraid to openly speak up about such topics like religious freedom, government policies, etc. People that participated in my project are anonymous. The protection of anonymity hopefully allowed them to talk more openly about the religions issues, government's policy and its effectiveness, legislation issues, and how these regulations affect their everyday lives as supporters of a particular religious group. In addition, to ensure that each individual is able to freely discuss whatever aspect of these issues, my questionnaire is open-ended.

All methods of gathering information mentioned above help me analyze and compare all the opinions of those who are concerned about this topic from ordinary people to official politicians and religious leaders to Imams. I think it will give me a holistic understanding that I need for my research project.

### **Data:**

#### **Legislation:**

In this section I provide legislation of Kazakhstan related to the research project, such as Constitution, Law on Legal Acts, Ethical Code of Civil Servants, Law On The Civil Service, Law On Religious Activities And Religious Associations, Order of the Minister of Education On the Approval of Requirements for Compulsory School Uniforms for Secondary Education Organizations. These norms provide the reader understanding of the kind of rights and freedoms citizens have in Kazakhstan, and, on the other hand, how other norms restrict some rights and freedoms and contradict to each other.

1. Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.<sup>55</sup>

- a. Clause 1 Article 1: “The Republic of Kazakhstan proclaims itself as a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms.”
- b. Clause 1 Article 4: “The provisions of the Constitution, the laws corresponding to it, other regulatory and legal acts, international agreements and other commitments of the Republic, as well as regulatory resolutions of the Constitutional Council and the Supreme Court of the Republic, shall be the functioning law in the Republic of Kazakhstan.”
- c. Clause 2 Article 4: “The Constitution shall have the highest juridical force and direct effect on the entire territory of the Republic.”
- d. Clause 3 Article 4: “International agreements ratified by the Republic have primacy over its laws. The legislation of the Republic determines the procedure and conditions of operation of international agreements in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan to which Kazakhstan is a party.”
- e. Clause 1 Article 5: “The Republic of Kazakhstan shall recognize ideological and political diversity. The formation of political parties in state bodies shall not be permitted.”
- f. Clause 1 Article 12: “Human rights and freedoms in the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be recognized and guaranteed in accordance with this Constitution.”
- g. Clause 2 Article 14: “No one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances.”

---

<sup>55</sup> Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, (Almaty, 1995), [http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000\\_](http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000_)

- h. Clause 1 Article 19: “Everyone shall have the right to determine and indicate or not indicate his national, party and religious affiliation.”
- i. Clause 1 Article 34: “Everyone must observe the Constitution, legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and respect the rights, freedoms, honor, and dignity of other people.”
- j. Article 39: “1. Rights and freedoms of an individual and citizen may be limited only by law and only to the extent necessary for the protection of the constitutional system, defense of public order, human rights and freedoms, and the health and morality of the population. 2. Any acts capable of violating inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony shall be recognized as unconstitutional. 3. Restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens for political reasons shall not be allowed in any form. The rights and freedoms provided for by articles 11, 13–15, paragraph 1 of article 16, article 17, article 19, article 22, paragraph 2 of article 26 of the Constitution, are not subject to limitation in any case.”
- k. Clause 2 Article 40: “The President of the Republic shall be a symbol and guarantor of the unity of the people and state power, the inviolability of the Constitution, the rights and freedoms of person and citizen.”
- l. Clause 1 Article 74: “Laws and international treaties recognized as non-compliant with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan may not be signed or, accordingly, ratified and enforced.”
- m. Clause 2 Article 74: “Laws and other legal acts recognized as unconstitutional, including those that infringe the rights and freedoms of a person and citizen enshrined in the Constitution, are repealed and shall not be applied.”

2. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Legal Acts<sup>56</sup>:

- a. Clause 1 Article 10: “The highest legal force belongs to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”

3. Ethical Code of Civil Servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan<sup>57</sup>:

- a. Article 5: “The appearance of a civil servant in the performance of his official duties should contribute to strengthening the authority of the state apparatus, consistent with the generally accepted business style, which is distinguished by formality, restraint and accuracy.”
- b. Article 6: “Government employees, including those in leadership positions, cannot openly demonstrate their religious beliefs in a collective, force subordinate employees to participate in the activities of public and religious associations, other non-profit organizations.»

4. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the civil service:<sup>58</sup>

- a. Clause 1 Article 9: “A civil servant has the right to enjoy the rights and freedoms guaranteed to the citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”

5. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activities and religious associations<sup>59</sup>:

“This Law is based on the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan represents itself as a democratic, secular state, affirms the right of everyone for freedom of conscience, guarantees equal rights of everyone regardless of his religious beliefs, recognizes the historical role of

---

<sup>56</sup> Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Legal Acts”, № 480-V, (Astana, 2016), <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1600000480>

<sup>57</sup> Kazakhstan, President, “Ethical Code of Civil Servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, № 153, (Astana, 2015), <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U1500000153>

<sup>58</sup> Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the civil service”, № 416-V, (Astana, 2015) <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1500000416>

<sup>59</sup> Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activities and religious associations”, № 483-IV, (Astana, 2011) <http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/Z1100000483>

Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people, respects other religions, combined with the spiritual heritage of the people of Kazakhstan, recognizes the importance of interreligious harmony, religious tolerance and respect for religious beliefs of citizens.”

- a. Clause 3 Article 3: “No religion may be established as a state religion or an obligatory one.”
- b. Clause 6 Article 3: “Everyone has the right to hold religious or other beliefs, disseminate them, participate in the activities of religious associations, and engage in missionary activity in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”

6. Order of the Minister of Education On the Approval of Requirements for Compulsory School Uniforms for Secondary Education Organizations:<sup>60</sup>

- a. Article 5: “The compulsory school uniform of secondary education organizations (hereinafter referred to as the school uniform) corresponds to the secular nature of education. Style, the color of the school uniform is maintained in the classical style, in a single color scheme, with the admission of mixing no more than three colors. The color of the school uniform is chosen from calm and not causing bright colors.”
- b. Article 13: “The inclusion of elements of clothing of religious affiliation of various faiths in school uniforms is not allowed.”

7. Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activities and Religious Associations."<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Kazakhstan, Ministry of Education and Science, “Order of the Minister of Education and Science on the Approval of Requirements for Compulsory School Uniforms for Secondary Education Organizations”, №99188, (Astana, 2016) <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1600013085>

The government of the Republic of Kazakhstan submitted this Draft Law to the Mazhilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan on December 29, 2017 after the meeting of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev with the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SBMK) on 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2017.<sup>62</sup> On May 16, 2018, the Mazhilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan approved in the first reading the draft. However, until today the Senate of the Parliament did not adopt it, however, the Committee on social and cultural development and science of the Senate reviewed it.<sup>63</sup>

- a. Clause 2 Article 1: “To make changes and additions to the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on administrative offenses: Supplement with Article 434-2 as follows:

“...2) Article 434-2. Violation of the requirements of the law with regard to wearing articles of clothing in public places that interfere with face recognition. 1. Violation of the requirements of the law in relation to wearing garments in public places that interfere with face recognition - entails a warning or a fine for individuals in the amount of fifty monthly calculation indices. 2. The action provided for in the first part of this article, committed repeatedly within a year after the imposition of an administrative penalty, shall entail a fine on individuals in the amount of one hundred and fifty monthly calculation indices...”

- i. ...4) Article 490 shall be amended as follows: "Article 490. Violation of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activities and

---

<sup>61</sup> “Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activities and Religious Associations”,  
<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1700000907>

<sup>62</sup> The Parliament consists of two Chambers: Senate and Mazhilis acting on a constant basis.  
<http://www.parlam.kz/en>

<sup>63</sup> Kazakhstan wants to ban clothes covering her face, Total, September 25, 2018,  
[https://total.kz/ru/news/religiya/v\\_kazahstane\\_hotyat\\_zapretit\\_odezhdu\\_zakrivaushchuu\\_litso\\_date\\_2018\\_09\\_25\\_15\\_28\\_04](https://total.kz/ru/news/religiya/v_kazahstane_hotyat_zapretit_odezhdu_zakrivaushchuu_litso_date_2018_09_25_15_28_04)



religious associations...12. The use, wearing and distribution in public places of external attributes, articles of clothing demonstrating belonging to destructive religious movements, entail a warning or a fine for individuals in the amount of fifty, for legal entities - in the amount of one hundred monthly calculation indices.”

b. Clause 6 Article 1: “The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Advertising...

...Article 6 shall be supplemented with paragraph 6-1 as follows:

i. "6-1. It is forbidden to use external attributes, articles of clothing, demonstrating belonging to destructive religious movements in advertising.””

c. Clause 8 Article 1: “In the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On the prevention of offenses...

i. ...1) Article 21 shall be supplemented with paragraph 2 as follows:

ii. "2. It is forbidden to wear articles of clothing in public places that interfere with face recognition, unless it is necessary for the performance of official (official) duties, for medical purposes, civil protection, under weather conditions, and also for participation in sports, sports and mass and cultural events.””

d. Clause 9 Article 1: “In the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On religious activities and religious associations...

i. ...12) Article 13 shall be supplemented with paragraph 6 as follows:

ii. "6. It cannot be the initiator of the created religious association, as well as the participant (member) of the religious association:

1) a person included in the list in accordance with paragraph 4 of

Article 12 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On

combating the legalization (laundering) of criminally obtained incomes and the financing of terrorism";

- 2) a person in respect of whom a judicial act has established legal involvement in extremist and (or) terrorist activities;
- 3) a public servant."

#### Open Sources:

Quotes of the Leader of the nation and President of Kazakhstan Nursultan

Nazarbayev from a meeting with the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SBMK) on 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2017:<sup>64</sup>

1. "As a result of lack of education, our young people let go of their beards and cut their trousers. The number of Kazakhstani girls who completely cover themselves with black robes is increasing. This does not correspond to either our traditions or our people. It is necessary to work out the issue of banning this at the legislative level. Kazakhs wear black clothes in mourning time."

2. "If young people follow instructions that are foreign to our people, what will happen to the state? We will not allow this. Independent Kazakhstan should have a bright future, the nation should be united, and the country should be secular and develop further. We will not tolerate those who oppose our goal. These are the interests of not only the state apparatus, these are the interests of the whole people of Kazakhstan, their future."

3. "Everyone knows that Kazakhstan has a large territory, natural wealth and resources. There are those who look at it all with envy. First of all, these are those who wish us harm, trying to cause disagreement in society. One of the ways to influence us from outside is to introduce religious teachings that are alien to our people - such a tendency has

---

<sup>64</sup> *The President of Kazakhstan proposed to work out a legislative ban on the wearing of non-traditional religious movements*, Sputnik, April 19, 2017, <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/society/20170419/2053754/nazarbaev-predlozhit-zapretit-chernye-odeyaniya-religioznyh-kazahstanok.html>

been observed recently. We must fight manifestations that pose a danger to our statehood. In this regard, you are facing great challenges”.

4. “To date, 3.8 thousand imams work in the SBMK. Half of the total number attended religious literacy courses. But it should be noted that this is not enough. We need to understand how we will raise the level of knowledge of imams and specialists working in this field. Only an educated imam can properly enlighten. He must have knowledge of his religion; he must study the characteristics of other religions, as well as have other knowledge. Imams should become ideologues with oratory skills and knowledge in human psychology.”

5. “A true Muslim is not known by clothing; his difference is in inner faith. If love is present in a person’s heart, it means that he has faith. We must move towards the civilized world, discover science and knowledge. Until the 18th-19th centuries, the Muslim world was a leader in the world. It was the source of science, the birthplace of philosophers, doctors and writers. Now we have lost the leading position in these matters.”

6. “Today, our citizens receive various information through the Internet. In the same way, they gain access to the sermons of non-traditional movements. For this, various methods and technologies are used. We also need to use information technology in the fight against them. If necessary, the state is ready to support the SBMK. Patriotism should be in each of us. In this regard, in our sermons, please pay attention to the theme of love for the motherland.”

From the interviews that was held between 25 December 2019 and 27 January 2020:

*From the interview with self-employed individuals:*

The self-employed individual is Sunni and usually attends the mosque for Friday prayers and tries to go other days. Overall, he attends the mosque typically two or three times a week, fasts during Ramadan for the past three years, prays five time a day, and considers himself as a Muslim since birth due as an ethnic Muslim. However, he is practicing Muslim

only for one and a half years. He does not believe that the government should be allowed to prohibit an individual's ability to wear a beard while working in the public service, but if government make some standards on the size and length of a beard, it would have been better.

He has enough time on Fridays to go to the Friday prayer and have a lunch, but notices that many people get up immediately after prayer and leave, because as he thinks they do not have enough time. The person that I interviewed does have enough time, as he is self-employed and works on his own schedule. Reaction of his partners and colleagues on five day prayers is normal, because they are also Muslims; though they are not practicing Muslims.

On question 25 (see appendix A), "have you ever had problems because of your religion?" he answered with the following:

"Just recently, I went to Uzbekistan, as a tourist, for a couple of days to see Tashkent and Samarkand. On our Kazakhstan border, I had a beard, but not a long beard; border guards stopped me. And they asked me if you pray? I said yes. Then they said, then we will take you to a separate room for 10 minutes and ask questions, if you do not mind. I said that I do not mind. Of course, if necessary, then ask. And then for the first time I felt some strange attitude, that if you pray and have a beard, they want to talk to you. But in the end, they simply asked me what I was doing, in what area of business I work, the purpose of travel, and then they said have a good trip. But it seemed strange to me."

His attitude towards the closure of prayer rooms in government organizations is negative. He thinks that it is a violation of Muslim rights in government organizations to restrict this aspect of religious freedom. "I am sure that among civil servants there is also someone among them who prays, and if they are forbidden to have a beard, then they are most likely even forbidden to pray and this is not right... We have a freedom of religion."

On question 37, he thinks that Ethical Code of civil servants contradicts the Constitution. He did not heard about the meeting of ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev with the leaders of SBMK and about errands to SBMK to work on the issues of the prohibition of

wearing a beard and cropped pants. However, he thinks that it is also a violation of Muslim rights.

He agrees that this is the attitude of the government; because of communist past and that current top leaders came from communist regime.

He thinks that the government is affiliated with SBMK because all sermons during Friday prayers are the same in all the mosques.

He thinks that the government is effective in combating the terrorists because he saw video clips how KNB (National Security Committee of Kazakhstan) arrested terrorists. Also, he noticed government operation “Zhusan” and was positive about it. He measures effectiveness of the government by the fact that there were no terrorist attacks over the past several years.<sup>65</sup>

He gives religious freedom in Kazakhstan an 8 out of 10 because there is no mechanism that prevents him from praying and he has personally never had any problems because of his religion.

From the owner of a business interview:

He is a Muslim, but does not consider himself either Sunni or Shiite. He does not pray five times a day, but goes to Friday prayer at the mosque every week and recently started to fast during Ramadan only last year.

He periodically carries a beard. “Well, as I grow it, but I periodically shave it off, because, as it were, we have such a business environment. As for us, as owners of companies, government bodies are accustomed to the Soviet image, that is, the beard should be shaved because not everyone understands this.”

---

<sup>65</sup> Zhusan operation – operation held by KNB on the return of citizens of Kazakhstan from military operations in Syria.

He is familiar with the prohibition of a beard in government organizations.

“I came across with this. In terms of I know such Muslims. Well, it is a life. Civil servants if they want to work they are obliged to shave off. This is fact. I came across with such people. I have even heard that many people are not always allowed to go to Friday prayer. So to be a full Muslim is not always easy in government organizations. So some people sacrifice it.”

However, he thinks that it is normal.

He has enough time to combine a Friday prayer and a lunch. “I may not go at all, I’m the head, and for me it’s not a problem at all.”

He has never had problems because of his faith. The attitude of his workers is good toward his faith. He had never had problems with the law enforcement because of his faith. Moreover, he says that police guard mosques and help people during Friday prayers.

Regarding closure of prayer rooms in government organizations and in airports, he said that he had not heard about it but he mentioned that some malls started to open such rooms. However, his attitude is negative about the closure and he thinks that instead government should open such rooms and make more comfort for religious persons.

On question 37 he answered next:

“Well, first of all, we are a secular state. Therefore, somewhere it is probably right because in a secular state civil servants should not show their belonging to any particular religion. Maybe it’s right, but on the other hand, probably at the same, it’s very twofold, but on the other hand, it is really discrimination. So I can’t answer, but knowing, for example, I’ll be subjective right now and I’ll be a little unjust to civil servants, but knowing our civil servants, I very rarely meet civil servants who are believers, because they do such things, that they probably have long sold their souls. We generally do not have confidence in the government.”

He heard about the meeting of ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev with the leaders of SBMK and about errands to SBMK to work on the issues of the prohibition of wearing a beard and cropped pants, which he thinks is also the violation of Muslim rights. However, he thinks that it was done because of the terrorist acts that were held in Kazakhstan.

He also agrees that this attitude of the government stems from Kazakhstan's long history of communism and that current top leaders came from Soviet era. Moreover, he says that top leaders are communists that do not understand their religion, their people, and traditions. "In general, they have all long been divorced from reality. They live in their own world; we live in our own world. We really have no contact with the state authorities, that is, we seem to live in two different countries."

He thinks that SBMK are affiliated with government and religious issues are controlled by the government. He thinks that it is good because radical or terrorists groups does not have an opportunity to recruit and spread their ideas.

He thinks that methods that use government against terrorists organizations are effective.

"I had a fear that I would come, then make friends with someone, then they would start to call me somewhere in some dubious communities, so I was afraid. For this year, no one has ever come up, no one has ever offered anything, so I think this is the merit of the state. Because if there wasn't this control, all these recruiters would go to every mosque and look for people who don't have enough knowledge about Islam and would start doing their own things."

From the interview with employee in one of the non-state organizations:

He is Sunni, goes to mosque every Friday, prays five times a day, and has been fasting since 2008. He considers himself as a Muslim from a birth, but a practicing Muslim since 2008. He does not have a beard but has not heard about the prohibition to wear a beard in the government organizations, however, he saw some public servants with a beard. Not only does he think that a beard cannot harm to the image of public servant, he thinks that this prohibition violate religious freedom of government workers.

The employee has enough time to go to Friday prayer and lunch. However, sometimes he was late to work because of his attendance at the mosque, but he did not explain the reason for his lateness.

His colleagues know that he is a Muslim, but very few know that he prays five times a day. His colleagues' reactions of him being a practising Muslim is neutral. He says that this is a relatively new change as many people felt negative toward practicing Muslims in the early 2010s.

Regarding question 24, he said next:

“Yes there was a case, and it lasted a very long time. The general producer, who knew that I was praying. This is a man who manages the entire agency, in different ways prevented people from praying and agitated people not to pray. Moreover,” he said, “wearing a beard, praying five times a day, going to a mosque are all indicators of some radical Islam, etc. But he was removed, for good, but he had held his position for 20 years. Therefore, you can imagine what pressure there was.

Regarding question 25 (*Have you ever had a problems because of your religion?*), he answered next:

“Of course, I had problems , they are now probably. Especially I had problems when I just started to pray at the university. When you are young, you have faith, but you do not have that confidence. You are always afraid of something from elder people and professors. When I was studying some professors and teachers, not all of course, who could come and say to my face that I am almost a terrorist. But now I am matured and have become a man and can fight back. But in my student days, when I was 16-17 years old, I was afraid that I would not be given a grade, etc. Now it's easy for me to deal with this.”

Regarding the closure of prayer rooms, he believes that they were closed because of global terrorists movements sparking fear in the government's ability to subdue them. “The state is already afraid and beware. There is a logic. I do not say that this is correct, but there is logic on the part of the national security. Well, anything can be within the framework of these rooms, and Salafis or Wahhabis can come together and agitate non-traditional Islam.”

Regarding question 37, he thinks that these laws contradict constitution.

Regarding question 38, he said that theoretically it violates the right of Muslims but sometimes the government should take such measures for the benefit of the unity of the people, and violate limited legal issues. He also believes that it is because of Kazakhstan's Soviet past and that they came from an old communist school.



He speculates that Spritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan is affiliated with the government. “It is very important. The main religion in a particular state should not contradict the state.”

He thinks that methods the government use against terrorists organizations are effective because his friends who work in the KNB tells him how they work. He measures effectiveness of the government by the fact that there were no terrorist attacks over the past 5-6 years. He thinks that religious freedom in the government is at the good level.

From the interview with a government worker:

He is Sunni, visits mosque every Friday, he does not pray five times a day, and does not have a beard. Regardless, he consider himself as a Muslim from birth. He did not come across the ban on wearing a beard. “Well, there is some informal understanding that it is not likely to wear a beard; but there were no direct order for the ban.”

He says that he finds discomfort with a lack of time to go to a Friday prayer and to participate in the lunch. His colleagues know that he is Muslim. However, he never paid attention on the reaction of others. The government worker does not experience obstacles from his colleagues or boss, as they are more concerned with his quality of work. Therefore, he concludes that he has never had any problems because of his religion.

He also confirmed that there are prayer rooms in government organizations although he also heard that they were closed. He had no reaction about it, because he believes that if a Muslim wants to pray, he will find where and how to do it.

Regarding question 37, he thinks that it does not contradicts Constitution.

Regarding question 38, he does not think that it is because of communist past; he says that it is because Kazakhstan is a secular country. He thinks that SBMK is affiliated with the government, because government should control it due to the terrorists’ acts.

He thinks that the government is effective, because of the work that is done by KNB. He often sees information in the news that KNB captured somebody suspected of being a terrorist and prevented the individual from carrying out the attack.

From the interview with Imam:

He is Sunni Muslim, and as an Imam, he works in the system of SBMK.

He heard about the prohibition of wearing a beard in government organizations and cites the reason for the ban is to thwart the threat of terrorists and wahabbists. He speculates that when those terrorists attacks occurred, the terrorists carried beards and now when people see someone with the beards, they associate them with the terrorists and are therefore afraid of those individuals.

The Imam acknowledged the lack of time to go to Friday prayers and participating in the lunch. He said that the SBMK knows about the problem and they are trying to reduce time Muslims spend at the Mosque by starting the preaching earlier and shorter.

Regarding the problem of faith, he said that people come to them to ask for an advice. Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan told citizens to open pages in social media to work with people, to be motivators for people, to help people.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding the problems with the law enforcement, he said that instead of the law enforcement agencies come to Imams and ask for a help.

“No, it was, on the contrary, to be honest, many asks for advice. They face terrorism and Wahhabism during thair work and always ask for help to explain them how to work with them. To be clear, they take us to prison so that we would work with people with bad intentions. They support us and we support them, because they are responsible for security, and we, as religious psychologists, are careful to help them. And we also advise them and teach them too. They take knowledge, so that they are always ready to answer.”

---

<sup>66</sup> Supreme Mufti – is a person who is a head of SBMK of Kazakhstan.

Regarding the closure of prayer rooms, Imam is aware of it. He explains it that Kazakhstan has different religions, and if the government decides open a prayer room for one religion, the government should also open one for another.

“We are considered as a secular country, not Islamic, and they pay attention to every religion. But now all other nationalities in Kazakhstan understand, they open rooms for Muslims in different shopping centers and airports. Right now other religions understand that they don’t do prayers every day, they understand that Muslims do every day and slowly the state opens prayer rooms for people.”

Regarding question 37, he thinks that it is not right when laws contradict the Constitution.

Regarding question 38, he said that there is a general confusion that people do not understood the President and meant those people which does not follow traditional religion.

Regarding question 44, he said that it is not because of communism. He stated that people who work in the government know religion and that the new President Tokaev supposedly goes to a mosque and gives sadaqah (charity) and states that, “The problem is that they do not have enough knowledge and that they are afraid.”

He says that SBMK is affiliated with the government and that the government builds mosques. The Imam says that counter-terrorism measures of the government are effective.

He estimates freedom of religion in Kazakhstan at 60 percent.

“We do not have a strong religious freedom to be honest. There are some reasons that we cannot practice religion completely freely. Yes, we were allowed to pray in mosques. We have how to say, the state is such that we should pray in certain places, not in some other institutions. We have a ban on a scarf, a ban on a beard in some organizations. We do not have such a strong religious freedom. But I think in the future it will be freer, because it takes time to get knowledge. Yes, we can believe, but if we look at the TV channels no one can say a word about Allah, there are such Kazakhstan channels. There are some channels on which we can say. You see, and from this we can say that we do not have such strong religious freedom, but the government builds mosques. The government is approaching this and in the future it may change, and in the future we will freely practice religion.”

## **Discussion:**

The analysis of legislation provides evidence that the fundamental law (the Constitution of Kazakhstan) secures the rights and freedoms of Kazakhstan citizens. Moreover, other laws (such as 4 and 5 in Data section) also secure the rights and freedoms that the Constitution provides. However, after reviewing the Ethic Code of Civil Servants, civil servants cannot openly demonstrate their religious beliefs in a collective or at work. This is definitely a contradiction to the Constitution. As interviews proved that almost all participants, except civil servants, believed that the norm in Ethical Code of Civil Servants contradicts to the Constitution. Furthermore, the Code also contradicts international law, particularly to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to the legislation of Kazakhstan, Constitutional Council is responsible to cancel laws or norms if they contradict to the Constitution. However, in order to start such procedure, a judge of a particular court considering a criminal or civil case must see that a particular norm or law contradicts the constitution and then send an appeal to the Council.<sup>67</sup>

Another conclusion is that some aspects of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activities and religious associations (such as Clause 3 of Article 3) contradicts the preamble of the Law, “This Law is based on the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan... recognizes the historical role of Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity...” This fact also raises questions, such as the following:

1. If the government recognizes the Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity, does the government recognize other religions?
2. Do citizens have the right to follow the basics of their religion? It was mentioned in literature review section that religious minorities groups like Ahmadiya’s and

---

<sup>67</sup> Kazakhstan, “Constitution”, Article 78.

Scientific Church faced problems, and still could not register as an official religions in Kazakhstan.

According to the Constituion, the President is a guarantor of rights and freedoms. However, after reviewing his quotes during the meeting with SBMK, it appears that he does not guarantee rights and freedoms. Instead, it is seen that he wants to impose religious restrictions on people by determining what to wear or not to wear and what religion to practice. After his speech, the government began work on draconian norms and measures that are evident in the Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activities and Religious Associations." It was found that several norms that this draft establishes actually violate human and religious rights. First of all, people cannot wear cloth that interferes with face recognition. Second, one cannot wear cloth that is associated or belongs to destructive religious movements, but it does not address who and how will decide that one or the other type of clothes belongs to destructive religious movements. Third, public servants cannot even be member to any religious associations.

From the President's speech and the Draft Law that was signed by Prime-Minister and approved in first reading in the Majilis of the Parliament, the attitude of the top management of Kazakhstan's executive and legislative branches is transparent. However, the Draft Law is not a law yet, and its future is still unknown. The last available information about the Draft Law is dated from September 25, 2018 and just contained that Committee on Social and Cultural Development and Science of the Senate reviewed it. In my opinion, the information lull was due to the fact that the public, the media, and international organizations raised noise relative to norms that violate human and religious rights. It can be concluded from the interviews that people have availability to practice basics of the religion such as praying five

times a day, fasting during Ramadan, etc. However, some of them face inconvenience and trouble due to their beliefs. It can also be concluded that some inconveniences and troubles depend on occupation and the level of your beliefs (if you obey to all attributes of Islam such as praying five times a day or wear a beard).

I believe that my hypothesis H1, which is based on literature review, is confirmed. Kazakhstan has overall good standing on individual religious freedoms and rights. The Constitution and other Laws secure the rights and freedoms as the citizens can freely practice fundamentals of Islam. However, the people that practice all attributes of the religion had some inconvenient situation and closer attention from law enforcement agencies. Moreover, Order of the Minister of Education On the Approval of Requirements for Compulsory School Uniforms for Secondary Education Organizations infringes on the rights of parents. “In Kazakhstan, dozens of parents are suing school principals. They are trying to challenge the clauses of the internal charter of schools, as well as the clause in the order of the Minister of Education of 2016 on uniform requirements for school uniforms.”<sup>68</sup>

Analysis of legislation and interviews prove that Kazakh leadership has a fundamental a misunderstanding of traditional and non-traditional religious movements, as Yemelianova noted it in literature review section.

Misunderstanding of religious movements and reaction of the President and other top leaders on the terrorists activities spill into draconian Draft Law; which, if accepted, will have bad consequences for Muslims. Perhaps, over time, they will start to radicalize and search other sources of religious information. In addition, terrorists groups can use it to recruit people, as Karin mentioned it in his book “Soldiers of Caliphate.”<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Sanat Urnaliev, *Ban on hijab in schools: discrimination or a necessary measure?*, Radio Azattyq, Jan. 31, 2018, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-hijab-uzbekistan-tajikistan-tatarstan/28999909.html>

<sup>69</sup> Erlan Karin, *Soldiers of Caliphate: Myths and Reality*, (Almaty: VMG Group Consultancy, 2014), p.27.

Hypothesis H2 is also proven true. Public servants are the most vulnerable part of population among examined in terms of violation of their religious freedoms and rights. It is mostly confirmed by the Ethical Code of Civil Servants and by participants, that there is non-official ban on the ability to carry a beard. This fact proves that there is a tension between official secularism and religiosity in Kazakhstan. Considering that almost all participants, except the government worker, and some scholars from literature review part agreed that violations of religious rights are due to the fact that the top management of the country are from Soviet period and see Islam as a threat for their regime because of not knowing the religion. Considering this, I can recommend the government top management to study religion and include religious classes in school curricula to improve fundamental understanding of religion.

To conclude, I have chosen the quote from a group of Kazakhstani scholars that describes the policy of the Kazakhstani regime between balancing of security, secularism and religiosity. “The interests of state stability (**or stability of the political regime**<sup>70</sup>), social order, and national security are much more important than the religious rights and freedoms as well any other rights and freedoms.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The rapidly growing popularization of religion in a country, in which religion was banned just 30 years ago, raises many questions and security threats. It is important for the state to approach the solution of emerging problems in such a period of uncertainty. However, it is even more important to understand how effective and efficient the methods are going to be to safeguard national security. Do governments respect and observe human, religious rights and freedoms? Or do the government exert too much control of believers

---

<sup>70</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>71</sup> Podoprighora et al. “Religious Freedom.”

who will then, in turn, go underground and fulfill their needs and knowledge in other dubious places or groups. I believe that my research-addressed issues that the Kazakhstan government should take into consideration.

I believe that the findings in this research can be applied to other Central Asian and Caucasian countries, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. and Azerbaijan. These countries have similar backgrounds and histories as Kazakhstan for almost a century, and they also have a trend towards the popularization of religion in their countries and the government restrictions. I hope that my research project will be a good start for the future researchers who want to study these regions and effects of the religion on the security issues in these countries.



## Bibliography

BBC, Feb. 8 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-51425903>, Translated by me.

Bergen, Peter L. *United States of Jihad*, Crown Publishing Group, 2016, p.14.

Brill Olcott, Martha. "Freedom of Religion, Tolerance, and Security in Central Asia." *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (September 2017): 24–34.  
doi:10.1080/15570274.2017.1354473.

Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activities and Religious Associations." <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1700000907>

Ethical code of civil servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U1500000153>

*Freedom in the World 2019: Kazakhstan*, Freedom House, Access date Feb.16, 2020,  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/kazakhstan>

Hann, Chris, and Mathijs Pelkmans. "Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 9 (November 2009): 1517–41. doi:10.1080/09668130903209111.

*In Kazakhstan, 500 Deatined After Protesting Election Seen as Shoo-In*, The New York Times, June 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/09/world/asia/kazakhstan-election-president.html>

Karin, Erlan and Jacon Zenn, *Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Foreign Fighters in the Syrian War*, Astana: CO3, 2017, p. 15

Karin, Erlan. *Soldiers of Caliphate: Myths and Reality*, Almaty: VMG Group Consultancy, 2014, p.27.

*Kazakhstan*, Amnesty International, Access date Feb.24, 2020,  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/>

*Kazakhstan Population 2020*, World Population Review, Access date Feb.15, 2020,  
<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-population/>

*Kazakh Police disperse protest against renaming of capital*, Reuters, Mar.21, 2019,  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-protests/kazakh-police-disperse-protest-against-renaming-of-capital-idUSKCN1R20K0>

*Kazakhstan. Events of 2018*, Human Rights Watch, Access date Feb. 24, 2020,  
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kazakhstan#ada87c>

- Kazakhstan wants to ban clothes covering her face, Total, September 25, 2018, [https://total.kz/ru/news/religiya/v\\_kazahstane\\_hotyat\\_zapretit\\_odezhdu\\_zakrivaushchuu\\_litso\\_date\\_2018\\_09\\_25\\_15\\_28\\_04](https://total.kz/ru/news/religiya/v_kazahstane_hotyat_zapretit_odezhdu_zakrivaushchuu_litso_date_2018_09_25_15_28_04)
- Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, (Almaty, 1995), [http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000\\_](http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/K950001000_)
- Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Legal Acts”, № 480-V, (Astana, 2016), <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1600000480>
- Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the civil service”, № 416-V, (Astana, 2015) <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1500000416>
- Kazakhstan, Parliament, “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activities and religious associations”, № 483-IV, (Astana, 2011) <http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/Z1100000483>
- Kazakhstan, President, “Ethical Code of Civil Servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, № 153, (Astana, 2015), <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U1500000153>
- Kazakhstan, Ministry of Education and Science, “Order of the Minister of Education and Science on the Approval of Requirements for Compulsory School Uniforms for Secondary Education Organizations”, №99188, (Astana, 2016) <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1600013085>
- Kiprop, Joseph. "Which Countries Border Russia?" WorldAtlas. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-russia.html> (accessed February 8, 2020).
- Lenz-Raymann, Kathrin. 2014. *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle. Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. Retrieved 8 Feb. 2020, from <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/455626>
- New amendments to the law on religious activities does not prohibit the wearing of hijabs in Kazakhstan*, Sputnik, May 16, 2018, <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/society/20180516/5639678/mazhilis-hidzhab-zapret-kazakhstan.html>
- Podoprigora, Roman, Nurlan Apakhayev, Aizhan Zhatkanbayeva, Dina Baimakhanova, Elina P. Kim, and Kaliya R. Sartayeva. “Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Kazakhstan,” *Statute Law Review*, (August 12, 2019). <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:5WT1-07T1-FGJR-24BT-00000-00&context=1516831>
- Rashid, Ahmed. *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Karachi [Pakistan]: Oxford University Press, 1994.

*Religious Freedom: What's At Stake If We Lose It*, The Heritage Foundation, Access date Apr.21, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/religious-liberty/heritage-explains/religious-freedom-whats-stake-if-we-lose-it>.

Snyder, Jack. 2019. "The Broken Bargain: How Nationalism Came Back." *Foreign Affairs* 98 (2): 54–60. doi:<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/archive>.

*The history of presidential elections in Kazakhstan*, Sputnik Kazakhstan, Access date Feb.24, 2020, <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/spravka/20190319/9203775/hronologiya-vybory-prezident-kazakhstan.html>, translated by author

*The President of Kazakhstan proposed to work out a legislative ban on the wearing of non-traditional religious movements*, Sputnik, April 19, 2017, <https://ru.sputniknews.kz/society/20170419/2053754/nazarbaev-predlozhit-zapretit-chernye-odeyaniya-religioznyh-kazahstanok.html>

United Nations. 1998. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948-1998. [New York]: [United Nations Dept. of Public Information].

*UN Human Rights Office calls on Kazakhstan to respect freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression and right to political participation*, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, June 12, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24691&LangID=E>

Urnaliev, Sanat , *Ban on hijab in schools: discrimination or a necessary measure?*, Radio Azattyq, Jan. 31, 2018, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-hijab-uzbekistan-tajikistan-tatarstan/28999909.html>

Varshalomidze, Tamila. *Ethnic Violence Blows the Hole in Kazakhstan's Narrative of Tolerance*, Aljazeera, Feb. 10 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/ethnic-violence-blows-hole-kazakhstan-narrative-tolerance-200210091600580.html>

Yemeljanova, G.M. "Islam, National Identity and Politics in Contemporary Kazakhstan." *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2014 pp. 286-301.

## Appendix 1

Interviews included Muslim participants from different professional spheres: one owner of a business, one self-employed, one employee in one of the non-state organizations, one government worker and one Imam. Overall participants: five people. Owner of a business, self-individual and Imam were recruited in Almaty city; other two participants were recruited in Astana. Interviews were held online by audio call. Audio files will be kept by Dr. Mark Stout for 3 years and then will be destroyed.

Interview with self-employed individual was held on 25<sup>th</sup> of December 2019;

Interview with the owner of a business was held on 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2019;

Interview with the employee in one of the non-state organizations was held on 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2020;

Interview with government worker was held on 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2020;

Interview with Imam was held on 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2020.

### Interview questions:

1. In what sphere do you work?
2. How long you have been working for the government? (only for government workers)
3. Are you a Muslim?
4. Are you Sunni or Shia?
5. How often do you attend the mosque?
6. Do you pray five times a day?
7. Do you fast?
8. If yes, How many years have you been fasting during the month of Ramadan?
9. How many years do you consider yourself as a Muslim?
10. Do you wear a beard?
11. If yes, how long do you wear beard?
12. Do you wear it because it is Sunna according the Islam?
13. Do you know that wearing a beard is prohibited in state bodies?
14. Have you ever come across this?
15. According to the article 5 of the Ethical code of civil servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan: "The appearance of a civil servant in the performance of his official duties should contribute to strengthening the authority of the state apparatus, consistent with the generally accepted business style, which is distinguished by formality, restraint and accuracy." Recalling this article, many government leaders prohibit wearing a beard due to the fact that civil servant should be accurate. Don't you think that it is violation of religious and human rights?
16. Have you ever encountered this prohibition? (only for government workers)
17. Do you go to Djuma (Friday) prayer?
18. If yes, do you have enough time at Friday to go to Djuma and have a lunch?
19. Have you ever been late to the work after Djuma?
20. If yes, what was the reaction of your colleagues and head of the organization?
21. Do your colleagues know that you are a Muslim?
22. Do the head of your organization knows that you are Muslim?
23. If you practice Islam (pray 5 times a day/go to Djuma/fast during Ramadan), what are your colleagues and head of the organizations attitude to it?

24. If you practice Islam (pray 5 times a day/go to Djuma/fast during Ramadan), does anybody from your work make any obstacles?
25. Have you ever had a problems because of your religion?
26. Have you ever had a problems because of your religion with law enforcement agencies?
27. Have you heard that before there were praying rooms in some government organizations?
28. Do you know that praying rooms at government organizations were closed?
29. Do you know why?
30. What is your attitude toward closing such praying rooms?
31. Do you think if it is violation of rights of the Muslims in government organizations?
32. Do you know that there were praying rooms in some airports and that they have been closed?
33. Do you know why?
34. What is your attitude toward closing such praying rooms?
35. Do you know that in some airports they re-opened praying rooms?
36. Do you know why they re-opened praying rooms in some airports?
37. According to the article 6 of the Ethical code of civil servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan: "Government employees, including those in leadership positions, cannot openly demonstrate their religious beliefs in a collective, force subordinate employees to participate in the activities of public and religious associations, other non-profit organizations.»). I understand the first part of this article in such a way that I cannot do one of the prayers of the five-fold prayer (as required by Islam) or wear a beard (as this is the Sunna of the Prophet Mohammed) during office hours in the office (since there are no other places). However, according to the article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan: "No one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances." Moreover, according to the article 19 of the Constitution: "Everyone shall have the right to determine and indicate or not indicate his national, party and religious affiliation." In addition, according to the clause 1 of the article 10 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Legal Acts: "The highest legal force belongs to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan." So, according to this information, do you think that some legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan not just violate human rights and religious freedom but also, contradicts to the Constitution of Kazakhstan? Could you comment on this?
38. Have you seen news how the ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with the leaders of Spiritual Board of Muslims and said them to work on the issue of the prohibition of wearing a beard and cropped pants?
39. If yes, what do you think about it?
40. Do you think if it is violation of rights of the Muslims in Kazakhstan?
41. Do you know what other Imams think about it? (Only for Imam)
42. He said that this measures will help to fight against terrorism, do you agree or disagree?
43. Can the leader of the democratic nation say such things, what do you think?
44. Do you think this attitude (violation of Muslims rights, if you think there are violations) is due to the fact that people who are in charge made their carrier during Soviet time? And during Soviet period religions were prohibited. Could you comment this question?

45. Have you heard about government program on Oralmans (Oralman is the ethnic Kazakhs that was born outside of Kazakhstan and people that hold not Kazakhstan citizenship). The program is about taking back Oralmans to the historic motherland and help them to assimilate in Kazakhstan by providing a certain amount of land and to help find the job?
46. Have you heard about what Chinese government doing with ethnic Turks (Uyghur, Kazakhs Kirgiz, etc) and Muslims in China? They are violating human and religious rights of these minorities and covering up these with counterterrorism measures. They are putting people into the so-called reeducation camps where they try make from them ethnic Chinese.
47. What are your feelings about it?
48. Do you know that there was no reaction on these from the Kazakhstan government? Do you know why or do you have any guesses?
49. Do you know how the government program towards Oralmans and government silence towards Chinese policy toward Turks and Muslims in China can exist in the same State? Why the government with Muslim majority do not react on it?
50. In your work have you ever worked with or across Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan?
51. Do the Spiritual Board of Muslims in Kazakhstan is affiliated with the government?
52. If yes, what do you think about it?
53. According to the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, government and religions should be separated, but as we have seen the above mentioned meeting of Nursultan Nazarbayev and Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan government and religions are not separated, what do you think about it?
54. Does the popularization of religion pose any threats?
55. If yes, Which ones?
56. What measures are taken by the state in combating various threats emanating from non-traditional religious movements?
57. Are the methods effective that are taken by the state?
58. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these methods?
59. What do you think the state can change in its methods in the fight against threats that popularization of religions poses?
60. What do you think of propaganda that Kazakhs were not Muslims but Tengrians? In your opinion, why do they do it?
61. Are current government or religious responses to emerging trends effective in terms of security in Kazakhstan?
62. Don't you think that this measures violate human and religious rights?
63. In your own view, how would you rate or estimate religious freedom in Kazakhstan?
64. What can be done to improve human rights, religious rights and religious freedom in Kazakhstan?
65. Do you want to make any additional comments or share any information regarding the topic?

## **BAKHIT IKRANBEKOV**

### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

**May, 2014 – To Date**

*Committee on Consumer Protection of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan*

**April, 2011 – February, 2014**

*Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Fighting with Economic and Corruption Crimes (Financial Police)*

### **EDUCATION**

**Johns Hopkins University, Washinton, DC, USA**

**2020**

*Advanced Academic Programs, MA in Global Security Studies*

**Kainar University, Almaty, Kazakhstan**

**2012**

*Faculty of Law and International Relations, Bachelor of Law*

**Kazakh National University named by Al-Farabi, Almaty, Kazakhstan**

**2008**

*Faculty of Economics and Business, Bachelor of Finance*

